

The Study of Prehistory in Indonesia: Retrospect and Prospect

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK ESTABLISHED

SPORADIC descriptions of prehistoric relics and temple ruins in the eighteenth century were a prelude to archaeological research in Indonesia in the nineteenth century. Researchers in the 1800s were from a variety of occupations. They were naturalists, missionaries, military officers, civil servants, painters, and photographers. Some can be considered founders of Indonesian archaeology, among them T. S. Raffles, R. H. T. Friederich, and J. W. Ijzerman. Although a wide range of archaeological material was excavated and explored, focal points of concern were the temples in Java, especially the most impressive ones, such as Borobudur and Prambanan. An archaeological association that was founded in 1885 was engaged chiefly with these big temple complexes. Concerning the period of growth of Indonesian archaeology, two points should be emphatically noted:

1. Greater knowledge of India's past, resulting from increased study, along with contemporaneous excavations by British explorers, had a remarkably strong impact on the interpretation of Indonesian ancient monuments. The result was a Hindu-oriented interpretation of the socio-religious background of these monuments, which persisted until the second quarter of the twentieth century.
2. The study of Indonesia's past was founded on unrelated individual interests—by researchers seeking to comprehend the surviving aspects of a suspected significant past.

The establishment of an archaeological committee in 1901, which was brought about at the urgent insistence of the prominent scholars, H. Kern, L. Serrurier, W. P. Groeneveldt, and G. P. Rouffaer, inaugurated a stage of systematic work. Survey and recording of archaeological remains including only limited areas of Java and Madura were then placed under governmental supervision. Though complete accounts and inventories of antiquities were brought to light in an official annual report, entitled *Rapporten van de Commissie in*

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Nederlandsch Indië voor oudheidkundig onderzoek op Java en Madoera, this committee was considered ineffective because of fluctuating concern by the government and the tendency for the committee to stagnate from being overdependent upon the chairman. This situation led to the liquidation of the archaeological committee and the foundation of the formal Archaeological Service in 1913, which obtained full governmental care. This new organization made possible a broadened scope for archaeological explorations, so that until the outbreak of World War II in Asia, rapid progress was made in defined archaeological fields. During this stage of consolidation, many basic fields of activity were inaugurated. These included, for instance, systematic restorations and descriptions of monuments, deciphering of ancient inscriptions, establishment of a chronology of art related to the feudal systems in the so-called Hindu-Javanese period, and the establishment of a prehistoric chronology. These activities stimulated profound interpretations which formed the groundwork for a comprehensive history of Indonesia's past. Significantly, it was soon recognized that there existed an unexplored indigenous nucleus of material that had marked characteristics of distinct cultural patterns, thus putting aside the former notion that Hindu civilization predominated in Indonesia's ancient history. Personalities like J. Brandes, F. D. K. Bosch, N. J. Krom, P. V. van Stein Callenfels and W. F. Stutterheim achieved the thoroughgoing results in this work that established them as the builders of Indonesian archaeology.

THE ANTECEDENT TO SYSTEMATIC PREHISTORIC RESEARCH

During the nineteenth century, in addition to searching for ancient "Hindu-Javanese" monuments, surveyors and collectors of prehistoric remains worked toward understanding a little-known past. The researchers had different backgrounds of study or specialization, and the work of each reflected a different state of knowledge and a different perspective on the overall attempt to explain the meaning of prehistoric artifacts. The chief subjects of interest were stone and bronze axes, bronze kettledrums, megaliths, and human fossil remains. Speculations on the historical setting of such items were introduced, presuming the existence of a stone-age period and the expansion of a bronze culture from the mainland of Asia. An outstanding discovery in prehistoric exploration was that of the *Pithecanthropus* skull cap (well known as the "Java-man") in 1891 by E. Dubois, who was searching for the missing link in human evolution in Indonesian territories. There was of course great popular interest in the problem of man's origin. Dubois's discovery at Trinil became a spectacular event in scientific circles, and opinions diverged as to whether this creature could be incorporated into the charted evolution of human beings. Further attempts to collect more data that could elucidate the place of *Pithecanthropus* were made by a German expedition headed by Frau L. Selenka in 1907-1908, but the expedition failed to find any further fragments of *Pithecanthropus*. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, intensive studies were done in cave cultures, kettledrums, and the Megalithic culture. These studies propounded hypotheses, some of which proved to be untenable. Based on differential shapes and patterns of ornamentation, kettledrums in Southeast Asia were classified into several types, and Indonesian drums were placed within the distribution area of the Heger I type; it was suggested that the megalithic tradition was introduced by peoples of the Mediterranean; differing racial groups were assumed to be the producers of the different cave cultures; and ancient beads were thought to have an interconnection with regions in Asia

and the Mediterranean. The Archaeological Service as a formal research institution, however, did not pay much attention to drums, caves, megaliths, or beads, as its greatest concern was the survey and preservation of "Hindu-Javanese" movements. The existence of a prehistoric stage preceding the Hinduized cultural level was still a matter of obscurity. But this period of study before systematization is important because of the accumulation of evidence for and the vigorous efforts toward archaeological interpretations. There appears to have been no attempt, however, to correlate prehistoric facts and relics into a cultural historical unit.

SYSTEMATIC PREHISTORIC RESEARCH

This period was marked by efforts to synthesize work in both small and large scale projects toward understanding the framework of prehistoric Indonesia, and to extend researches to fill in the framework using collected data acquired during the previous period of research. Researches and excavations to find items from successive cultural stages were carried out cooperatively in order to build a prehistoric chronology. The results of these activities represented important steps in the study of prehistory, and they gave rise to theories and working hypotheses concerning the development of culture phenomena, their entities, origins, and extensions.

Two occurrences marked the beginning of systematic prehistoric research in Indonesia:

1. A statement by the head of the Archaeological Service in 1921 that this institution must undertake serious research on prehistoric evidence. Consistent with that challenge, the annual report of the Archaeological Service (beginning with 1923) included a separate column devoted to prehistoric reports.
2. The designation of an official holding responsibility for carrying out prehistoric research. This position was taken for the first time by P. V. van Stein Callenfels.

Both these events opened new perspectives in the study of prehistory and symbolized the achievement of a firm basis for systematic research.

Various subjects of Indonesia's prehistory, covering the first stages of man's existence in the archipelago up to the foundation of the first kingdoms, have been tackled by a large number of investigators. Van Stein Callenfels was the founder of prehistoric archaeology in Indonesia. He not only cleared the way to a systematic approach to prehistoric finds and antiquities, but also organized the First Congress of Prehistorians of the Far East that assembled in Hanoi in 1932. Through his initiative, a division of prehistory was established at the Museum of the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap in 1933. Until the outbreak of World War II, there was a steady increase of data that not only gave detailed insight into distinct cultural levels, but which at last showed an overall picture of Indonesia's prehistoric past. In the period of about fifteen years preceding the Japanese occupation, van Stein Callenfels, R. von Heine-Geldern, and A. N. J. Th. à Th. van der Hoop did comparative studies, producing fundamental works on Indonesian prehistoric chronology based mainly on typological studies and supported by geological observations. These achievements resulted from progress in prehistoric research in neighboring areas also, especially on the Malay Peninsula, in Vietnam, and South China during the same period. The failure to publish full reports on the part of professional explorers concerning new discoveries, surveys, and excavations was one of the weak points of this period of intensive research.

Another weak point was the rather arbitrary way excavations and surveys were accomplished, because activities in the field were carried out chiefly by persons without archaeological training.

Concluding this discussion of systematic research, it can be said that consciousness of the rich cultural-historical value of prehistoric remains drew researchers into exhaustive explorations. These finally resulted in an accumulation of evidence that fit into the initial outline of a tightly packed, correlated body of events during prehistoric periods.

THE FUTURE AND ITS PROBLEMS

Altered circumstances in Indonesia, directly after the war and up to the present, reduced the intensity of prehistoric study. Research activities decreased considerably, for work was attempted by only a few persons. H. R. van Heekeren, who was productive before the war as an amateur, became full-time prehistorian at the Archaeological Service, and before his return to Holland he made important contributions on the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze ages. His results enlarge prehistoric data and strengthen the basis of prehistoric chronology. Two volumes of van Heekeren's on Indonesian prehistory, published in 1957 and 1958, contain exhaustive data that indicate continual attempts to complete the body of the chronology. R. von Heine-Geldern's article on prehistoric research in Indonesia, published in 1945, explicates the progress of fieldwork and study, including conceptions on prehistoric migrations and origins. His review of shortcomings in methods and techniques of explorations as well as his suggestions for future activities point to his keen perception of the problems in the field of prehistoric research.

After van Heekeren's departure, I took over the task of prehistoric exploration. As the only official of the Archaeological Service, I was able, to some extent, to advance information on the Palaeolithic and the Bronze ages. New discoveries have been made, among which are more cranial remains of *Pithecanthropus erectus* and a bronze-age settlement; but the way to more important discoveries in the future is still open. The territory of the Indonesian Archipelago is enormous, and evidences of a prehistoric past seem to be abundant, so that the task of prehistorians in Indonesia is still tremendous. Problems concerning the distribution of artifacts and relationships with Asian regions must be tackled with far greater care. This effort will require intensive surveys in areas never touched before. Establishing a competent and extended research staff and training personnel are prerequisites that will take time. Yet another problem appears: the use of modern dating methods, which is still not practiced in Indonesia. A chronological framework built without using the new methods of dating will be less valuable, so re-datings of important sites of discovery must be carried out by the new methods. Cooperation with foreign institutions will be fruitful, especially in dating, application of technology in fieldwork, and specialist training.

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